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EXAMINER

PALO, FRANCIS T

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PAPER

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

The time period for reply, if any, is set in the attached communication.

DETAILED ACTION

Response to Amendment

Applicant's arguments filed 4/15/08 have been fully considered but they are not persuasive.

The examiner is reminded that when determining the differences between the prior art and the claims, the question under 35 USC § 103 is not whether the differences themselves would have been obvious, but whether the claimed invention as a whole would have been obvious; and that the examiner has not shown how any reference or combination of references suggests that features selected from them should be combined in the manner that applicant discovered.

Applicant is respectfully reminded that KSR forecloses the argument that a specific teaching, suggestion, or motivation is required to support a finding of obviousness, and in view of the guidance provided by the Supreme Court in KSR, an examiner must continue to articulate a reason or rationale to support an obviousness rejection, and when formulating an obviousness rejection, an examiner should expect that a person of ordinary skill in the art will exercise ordinary creativity, common sense and logic. The examiner submits that the guidelines discussed above properly support the obviousness rejections made in the prior office action.

Art Unit: 3644

Applicant further asserts that Smak '014 does not teach a tray wherein each cavity is substantially *symmetrically open-ended at both ends*, and the examiner has noted that the limitation "substantially" as previously relied upon in the claim, is not specific enough to distinguish between the hexagonal-shaped open ends of Smak '014, or more specifically that the ribs of Smak '014 extend further into the base of the cavity rather than the top of the cavity.

By amendment applicant has removed said limitation and incorporated a number of features recited in the now cancelled dependent claims; Applicant's arguments have been considered but are now considered as moot in view of the new ground(s) of rejection, and the examiner upon further consideration, submits a new ground(s) of rejection as follows.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.

Claims 1, 3, 4, 6, 8 and 9 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a),

as being unpatentable over **Otwell** (US 1,993,620) 1935

and **Pullman** (5,060,418) 1991, in view of **Keskilohko** (US Des. 504,530) 1998.

Regarding amended **claim-1**:

The examiner has maintained that trays comprising a plurality of non-tapered cavities symmetrically open-ended at both ends are old in the art of plant production, and in their construction have evolved from paper or other like flexible material to “substantially rigid material” as claimed; **Otwell ‘620** and **Pullman ‘418** fairly well teach that contention. Neither Otwell nor Pullman however teach ribs protruding into the cavities as claimed.

Keskilohko ‘530 like many others teach a tray for the growing of seedlings having a plurality of rectangular ribs protruding into each cavity, positioned and extending as claimed.

It has been held that it is not required that the prior art disclose or suggest the properties ‘newly-discovered’ by an applicant in order for there to be a prima facie case of obviousness (see *In re Dillon*). Moreover, as long as some motivation or suggestion to combine the reference is provided by the prior art taken as a whole, the law does not require that the references be combined for the reasons contemplated by the inventor (see *In re Beattie*). The test for obviousness is not whether the features of a secondary reference may be bodily incorporated into the structure of the primary reference; nor is it that the claimed invention must be expressly suggested in any one or all of the references. Rather, the test is what the combined teachings of the reference would have suggested to those of ordinary skill in the art (see *In re Keller*).

In this regard, a conclusion of obviousness may be based on common knowledge and common sense of the person of ordinary skill in the art without any specific hint or suggestion in a particular reference (see *In re Bozek*).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made, to have provided the tray of Pullman '418, specifically the cells of Pullman, with ribs as taught by Keskilohko '530 for the well known advantages of that feature, such as strengthening means or soil plug retention means, as where a claimed improvement on a device or apparatus is no more than "the simple substitution of one known element for another or the mere application of a known technique to a piece of prior art ready for improvement," the claim is unpatentable under 35 U.S.C. 103(a). *Ex Parte Smith*, 83 USPQ.2d 1509, 1518-19 (BPAI, 2007) (citing *KSR v. Teleflex*, 127 S.Ct. 1727, 1740, 82 USPQ2d 1385, 1396 (2007)).

Accordingly, applicant claims a combination that only unites old elements with no change in the respective functions of those old elements, and the combination of those elements yields predictable results; absent evidence that the modifications necessary to effect the combination of elements is uniquely challenging or difficult for one of ordinary skill in the art, the claim is unpatentable as obvious under 35 U.S.C. 103(a). *Ex Parte Smith*, 83 USPQ.2d at 1518-19 (BPAI, 2007) (citing *KSR*, 127 S.Ct. at 1740, 82 USPQ2d at 1396).

Art Unit: 3644

Accordingly, since the applicant has submitted no persuasive evidence that the combination of the above elements is uniquely challenging or difficult for one of ordinary skill in the art, the claim is unpatentable as obvious under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) because it is no more than the predictable use of prior art elements according to their established functions resulting in the simple substitution of one known element for another or the mere application of a known technique to a piece of prior art ready for improvement.

Regarding **claims 3 and 4**:

The discussion above regarding claim-1 is relied upon.

The square (polygonal) non-tapered cavities of Pullman are of uniform size and shape as claimed.

Regarding **claims 6, 8 and 9**:

The discussion above regarding claim-1 is relied upon.

The ribs of Pullman as modified by Keskilohko are uniform in size, evenly spaced and positioned as claimed.

Conclusion

The prior art made of record and not relied upon is considered pertinent to applicant's disclosure.

van Wingerden '188 and Timmis '588 teach variations on the miniplug tray.

Saarinen '048 and Panth '000 teach ribs in plant trays.

Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to Francis T. Palo whose telephone number is 571-272-6907. The examiner can normally be reached on M-Tu.,Th.-F.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Michael Mansen can be reached on 571-272-6608. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300.

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Art Unit: 3644

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/Francis T. Palo/
Primary Examiner
Art Unit 3644